

IOSAGAN
AND OTHER STORIES
BY P. H. PEARSE

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IOSAGAN AND
OTHER STORIES
BY PADRAIC PEARSE
TRANSLATED BY JOSEPH CAMPBELL

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IOSAGAN
THE PRIEST
BARBARA
EOINEEN OF THE BIRDS

IOSAGAN

Old Matthias was sitting beside his door. Anyone going the road would think that it was an image of stone or of marble was in it—that, or a dead person—for he couldn't believe that a living man could stay so calm, so quiet as that. He had his head high and an ear on him listening. It's many a musical sound there was to listen to, for the person who'd have heed on them. Old Matthias heard the roar of the waves on the rocks, and the murmur of the stream flowing down and over the stones. He heard the screech of the heron-crane from the high, rocky shore, and the lowing of the cows from the pasture, and the bright laughter of the children from the green. But it wasn't to any of these he was listening that attentively—though all of them were sweet to him—but to the clear sound of the bell for Mass that was coming to him on the wind in the morning stillness.

All the people were gathered into Mass. Old Matthias saw them going past, in ones

IOSAGAN

and twos, or in little groups. The boys were running and leaping. The girls were chattering merrily. The women were conversing in low tones. The men were silent. Like this, they'd travel the road every Sunday. Like this, Old Matthias would sit on his chair watching them till they'd go out of sight. They went past him this morning as usual. The old man remained looking at them till there was an end to the noise and the commotion, till the last group cleared the top of the church hill, till there was nothing to be seen but a long, straight road stretching out, and it white, till there were none to be found in the village but an odd old person in his bed, or children tricking on the green, and himself sitting beside his door.

Old Matthias would not go to the chapel. He hadn't heard "the sweet Mass" for over three score years. He was a strong, active youth the last time he blessed himself before the people, and now he was a withered, done old man, his share of hair grey-white, furrows in his brow, his shoulders bent. He hadn't bent his knee before God for the length of those three

IOSAGAN

score years ; he hadn't put a prayer to his Creator ; he hadn't given thanks to his Saviour. A man apart, Old Matthias was.

Nobody knew why he wouldn't go to Mass. People said that he didn't believe there was a God in it. Other people said that he committed some terrible sin at the start of his life, and when the priest wouldn't give him absolution in confession, that a rage of anger came on him, and he swore an oath that he wouldn't touch priest or chapel while he was living again. Other people said—but this was said only in a whisper by the fireside when the old people would be yarning by themselves after the children had gone asleep—these said that he sold his soul to a certain Great Man that he met once on the top of Cnoc-a'-daimh, and that this person wouldn't allow him to frequent the Mass. I don't know is it true or lying these stories are, but I do know that old Matthias wasn't seen at God's Mass in the memory of the oldest person in the village. Cuimin O'Niadh—an old man that got death a couple of years before this in his ninetieth year—said that he

IOSAGAN

himself saw him there when he was a lump of a lad.

It wasn't thought that Old Matthias was a bad character. He was a man as honest, as simple, as natural as you would meet in a day's walking. There wasn't ever heard out of his mouth but the good word. He had no delight in drink or in company, no wish for gold or for property. He was poor, but it's often he shared with people that were poorer than he. He had pity for the infirm. He had mercy for the wretched. Other men had honour and esteem for him. The women, the children, and the animals loved him ; and he had love for them and for everything that was generous and of clean heart.

Old Matthias liked women's talk better than men's talk. But he liked the talk of boys and girls still better than the talk of men or women. He used say that the women were more discerning than the men, and that the children were more discerning than either of them. It's along with the young folk he would spend the best part of his idle time. He would sit with them in a corner of the house, telling them stories,

IOSAGAN

or getting stories out of them. They were wonderful, his share of stories. He had the "Adventures of the Grey Horse" in grandest way in the world. He was the one old body in the village who had the story of the "Hen-Harrier and the Wren," properly. Isn't it he would put fright on the children, and he reciting "*Fú Fá Féasóg*" (The Two-Headed Giant), and isn't it he would take the laughs out of them discoursing on the doings of the piper in the Snail's Castle ! And the songs he had ! He could coax an ailing child asleep with his :

"Shoheen, sho, and sleep, my pet ;
The fairies are out walking the glen !"

or he could put the full of a house of children in fits of laughter with his :

"Hi diddle dum, the cat and his mother,
That went to Galway riding a drake !"

And isn't it he had the funny old ranns ; and the hard, difficult questions ; and the fine riddles ! As for games, where was the person, man, woman, or child could keep "*Lúrabóg, Lárabóg,*" or "*An Bhuidhean*"

IOSAGAN

Bhalbh” (The Dumb Band) going with him !

In the fine time it's on the side of the hill, or walking the bog, you'd see Old Matthias and his little playmates, he explaining to them the way of life of the ants and of the woodlice, or inventing stories about the hedgehog and the red squirrel. Another time to them boating, the old man with an oar, some little wee boy with another one, and maybe a young girl steering. It's often the people who'd be working near the strand would hear the shouts of joy of the children coming to them from the harbour-mouth, or, it might be, Old Matthias's voice, and he saying :

“ Oró ! my curragheen O !
And óró ! my little boat ! ”

or something like it.

There used come fear on a share of the mothers at times, and they'd say to each other that they oughtn't let their children spend that much time with Old Matthias,—“ a man that frequents neither clergy nor Mass.” Once a woman of them laid bare these thoughts to Father Sean. It's what the priest said :

IOSAGAN

“Don’t meddle with the poor children,” says he. “They couldn’t be in better company.”

“But they tell me he doesn’t believe in God, Father.”

“There’s many a saint in heaven to-day that didn’t believe in God some time of his life. And, whisper here. If Old Matthias hasn’t love for God—a thing that neither you nor I know—it’s wonderful the love he has for the cleanest and most beautiful thing that God created,—the shining soul of the child. Our Saviour Himself and the most glorious saints in heaven had the same love for them. How do we know that it isn’t the children that will draw Old Matthias to the knee of our Saviour yet?”

And the story was left like that.

On this Sunday morning the old man remained listening till the bell for Mass stopped ringing. When there was an end to it he gave a sigh, as the person would that would be weary and sorrowful, and he turned to the group of boys that were sporting themselves on the plot of grass—the “green” Old Matthias would call it—at the cross-roads. Old Matthias knew every

IOSAGAN

curly-headed, bare-footed child of them. He liked no pastime at all better than to be sitting there watching them and listening to them. He was counting them, seeing which of his friends were in it and which of them were gone to Mass with the grown people, when he noticed among them a child he never saw before. A little, brown boy, with a white coat on him, like was on every other boy, and he without shoes or cap, as is the custom with the children of the West. The face of this boy was as bright as the sun, and it seemed to Old Matthias that there were, as it would be, rays of light coming from his head. The sun shining on his share of hair, maybe.

There was wonder on the old man at seeing this child, for he hadn't heard that there were any strangers after coming to the village. He was on the point of going over and questioning one of the little lads about him, when he heard the stir and chatter of the people coming home from Mass. He didn't feel the time slipping by him while his mind was on the tricks of the boys. Some of the people saluted him going past, and he saluted them. When he gave

IOSAGAN

an eye on the group of boys again, the strange boy wasn't among them.

The Sunday after that, Old Matthias was sitting beside his door, as usual. The people were gathered west to Mass. The young folk were running and throwing jumps on the green. Running and throwing jumps along with them was the strange child. Matthias looked at him for a long time, for he gave the love of his heart to him on account of the beauty of his person and the brightness of his countenance. At last he called over one of the little boys :

“ Who's yon boy I see among you for a fortnight back, Coilin? ” says he—“ he there with the brown head on him,—but have a care that it's not reddish-fair he is : I don't know is it dark or fair he is, and the way the sun is burning on him. Do you see him now—that one that's running towards us? ”

“ That's Iosagan,” says the little lad.

“ Iosagan? ”

“ That's the name he gives himself.”

“ Who are his people? ”

“ I don't know, but he says his father's a king.”

IOSAGAN

"Where does he live?"

"He never told us that, but he says that it's not far from us his house is."

"Does he be along with you often?"

"Aye, when we do be spending time to ourselves like this. But he goes from us when a grown person is present. Look! he's gone already!"

The old man looked, and there was no one in it but the boys he knew. The child, the little boy called Iosagan, was missing. The same moment, the noise and bustle of the people were heard returning from Mass.

The next Sunday everything fell out exactly as it fell on the two Sundays before that. The people gathered west as usual, and the old man and the children were left by themselves in the village. The heart of Old Matthias gave a leap in his middle when he saw the Holy Child among them again.

He rose. He went over and he stood near Him. After a time, standing without a move, he stretched his two hands towards Him, and he spoke in a low voice:

"Iosagan!"

IOSAGAN

The Child heard him, and He came towards him, running.

“Come here and sit on my knee for a little while, Iosagan.”

The Child put His hand in the thin, knuckly hand of the old man, and they travelled side by side across the road. Old Matthias sat on his chair, and drew Iosagan to his breast.

“Where do You live, Iosagan?” says he, speaking low always.

“Not far from this My House is. Why don’t you come on a visit to Me?”

“I’d be afraid in a royal house. It’s told me that Your Father’s a King.”

“He is High-King of the World. But there is no need for you to be afraid of Him. He is full of mercy and love.”

“I fear I haven’t kept His law.”

“Ask forgiveness of Him. I and My Mother will make intercession for you.”

“It’s a pity I didn’t see You before this, Iosagan. Where were You from me?”

“I was here always. I do be travelling the roads, and walking the hills, and ploughing the waves. I do be among the people when they gather into My House. I do be

IOSAGAN

among the children they do leave behind them playing on the street."

"I was too timid—or too proud—to go into Your House, Iosagan; but I found You among the children."

"There isn't any time or place that children do be amusing themselves that I am not along with them. Times they see Me; other times they do not see Me."

"I never saw You till lately."

"The grown people do be blind."

"And it has been granted me to see You, Iosagan?"

"My Father gave Me leave to show Myself to you, because you loved His little children."

The voices were heard of the people returning from Mass.

"I must go now from you."

"Let me kiss the border of Your coat, Iosagan."

"Kiss it."

"Shall I see You again?"

"You will."

"When?"

"This night."

With that word He was gone.

IOSAGAN

“I will see Him this night !” says Old Matthias, and he going into the house.

.

The night came wet and stormy. The great waves were heard breaking with a booming roar against the strand. The trees round the chapel were swaying and bending with the strength of the wind. (The chapel is on a little hill that falls down with a slope to the sea.) Father Sean was on the point of closing his book and saying his Rosary when he heard a noise, as it would be somebody knocking at the door. He listened for a spell. He heard the noise again. He rose from the fire, went to the door, and opened it. A little boy was standing on the door-flag—a boy the priest didn't mind ever to have seen before. He had a white coat on him, and he without shoes or cap. The priest thought that there were rays of light shining from his countenance, and about his head. The moon that was shining on his brown, comely head, it's like.

“Who have I here?” says Father Sean.

“Put on you as quickly as you're able,

IOSAGAN

Father, and strike east to the house of Old Matthias. He is in the mouths of death."

The priest didn't want the second word.

"Sit here till I'm ready," says he. But when he came back, the little messenger was gone.

Father Sean struck the road, and he didn't take long to finish the journey, though the wind was against him, and it raining heavily. There was a light in Old Matthias's house before him. He took the latch from the door, and went in.

"Who is this coming to me?" says a voice from the old man's bed.

"The priest."

"I'd like to speak to you, Father. Sit here beside me." The voice was feeble, and the words came slowly from him.

The priest sat down, and heard Old Matthias's story from beginning to end. Whatever secret was in the old body's heart it was laid bare to the servant of God there in the middle of the night. When the confession was over, Old Matthias received communion, and he was anointed.

"Who told you that I was wanting you, Father?" says he in a weak, low voice, when

IOSAGAN

everything was done. "I was praying God that you'd come, but I hadn't any messenger to send for you."

"But, sure, you did send a messenger to me?" says the priest, and great wonder on him.

"I didn't."

"You didn't? But a little boy came, and he knocked at my door, and he said to me that you were wanting my help!"

The old man sat up straight in the bed. There was a flashing in his eyes.

"What sort was the little boy was in it, Father?"

"A gentle little boy, with a white coat on him."

"Did you take notice was there a haze of light about his head?"

"I did, and it put great wonder on me."

Old Matthias looked up, there came a smile on his mouth, and he stretched out his two arms:

"Iosagan!" says he.

With that word, he fell back on the bed. The priest went hither to him softly, and closed his eyes.

THE PRIEST

THE PRIEST

It's in yon little house you see in the glen below you, and you going down the road from Gortmore to Inver, that my Priest lives. Himself and his mother, and his little sister, and his little, small, wee brother,—those are the family in it. The father died before Taimeen, the youngest child of them, was born. There's no time I do be in Rossnageeragh but I spend an evening or two along with them, for the Priest and Maireen (the little sister) and Taimeen are the dearest friends I have. A soft, youngish-looking woman the Priest's mother is; she's a bit headstrong, maybe, but if she is itself she's as kind-hearted a woman as is living, after that. 'Twas she told me this story one evening that I was on a visit to her. She was washing the Priest, meanwhile, before the fire: a big tub of water laid on the floor beside her, the Priest and his share of clothes stripped from him, and she rubbing and scrubbing every inch of his body. I have my doubts that this work agreed too

THE PRIEST

well with the Priest, for now and again he'd let a screech out of him. With every screech his mother would give him a little slap, and after that she'd kiss him. It's hard for a mother to keep her hand off a child when she has him bare; and 'twould be harder than that for a mother, as loving as this mother, to keep her mouth from a wee, red moutheen as sweet as Paraig's (Paraig's my Priest's name, you know). I ought to say that the Priest was only eight years old yet. He was a lovely picture, standing there, and the firelight shining on his well-knit body and on his curly head, and dancing in his grey, laughing eyes. When I think on Paraig, it's that way I see him before me, standing on the floor in the brightening of the fire.

But in regard to the story. About a year before this it is it fell out. Nora (the mother) was working about the house. Maireen and Taimeen were amusing themselves on the floor. "*Fromsó Framsó*" they had going on. Maireen was trying to teach the words to Taimeen, a thing that was failing on her, for Taimeen hadn't any talk yet. You know the words, I suppose?—

THE PRIEST

they're worth learning, for there's true poetry in them:

“ *Fromsó Framsó,—*

A woman dancing,

That would make sport,

That would drink ale,

That would be in time

Here in the morning!”

Nora wanted a can of water to make tea.
It was supper-time.

“Where's Paraig, Maireen?” says she.

“He's lost this half-hour.”

“He went into the room, mameen.”

“Paraig!” says the mother, calling loudly.

Not a word from within.

“Do you hear, Paraig?”

Never a word.

“What's wrong with the boy? Paraig, I say!” says she, as loud as it was in her head.

“I'll be out presently, mama,” says a voice from the room.

“Hurry with you, son. It's tea-time, and devil a tear of water have I in the house.”

THE PRIEST

Paraig came out of the room.

“You’re found at last. Push on down with you,—but what’s this? Where did you get that shirt, or why is it on you? What were you doing?”

Paraig was standing in the door, like a stake. A shirt was fastened on him over his little coat. He looked down on himself. His face was red-burning to the ears.

“I forgot to take it off me, mama,” says he.

“Why is it on you at all?”

“Sport I was having.”

“Take it off you this minute! The rod you want, yourself and your sport!”

Paraig took off the shirt without a word and left it back in the room.

“Brush down to the well now and get a can of water for me, like a pet.” Nora already regretted that she spoke as harshly as that. It’s a woman’s anger that isn’t lasting.

Paraig took the can and whipped off with it. Michileen Enda, a neighbour’s boy, came in while he was out.

“It beats me, Michileen,” says Nora, after a spell, “to make out what Paraig does

THE PRIEST

be doing in that room the length of the evening. No sooner has he his dinner eaten every day than he clears off in there, and he's lost till supper-time."

"Some sport he does have on foot," says Michileen.

"That's what he says himself. But it's not in the house a lad like him ought to be stuck on a fine evening, but outside in the air, tearing away."

"'A body's will is his delight,'" says Michileen, reddening his pipe.

"One apart is Paraig, anyhow," says Nora. "He's the most contrary son you ever saw. Times, three people wouldn't watch him, and other times you wouldn't feel him in the house."

Paraig came in at this, and no more was said on the question. He didn't steal away this time, but instead of that he sat down on the floor, playing "*Fromsó Framsó*" with Maireen and Taimeen.

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The dinner was on the table when Paraig came home from school the next evening. He ate his share of stirabout and he drank

THE PRIEST

his noggin of milk, thankfully and with blessing. As soon as he had eaten and drunk, he took his satchel of books and went with him into the room, as was his habit.

The mother didn't let on that she was giving any heed to him. But, after a couple of minutes, she opened the door of the room quietly, and stuck the tip of her nose inside. Paraig didn't notice her, but she had a view of everything that was going on in the room.

It was a queer sight. Paraig was standing beside the table and he dressed in the shirt again. Outside of this, and back over his shoulders, he was fixing a red bodice of his mother's, that she had hanging on the wall. When he had this arranged properly, he took out the biggest book he had in his satchel—the "Second Book" it was, I believe—he opened it, and laid it before him on the table, propped against the looking-glass.

It's then began the antics in earnest. Paraig stood out opposite the table, bent his knee, blessed himself, and began praying loudly. It's not well Nora was able to understand him, but, as she thought, he had Latin and Gaelic mixed through other, and

THE PRIEST

an odd word that wasn't like Latin or Gaelic. Once, it seemed to her, she heard the words "*Fromsó Framsó,*" but she wasn't sure. Whatever wonder was on Nora at this, it was seven times greater the wonder was on her when she saw Paraig genuflecting, beating his breast, kissing the table, letting on he was reading Latin prayers out of the "Second Book," and playing one trick odder than another. She didn't know rightly what he was up to, till he turned round and said :

"*Dominus vobiscum !*"

"God save us !" says she to herself when she saw this. "He's pretending that he's a priest and he reading Mass ! That's the Mass vestment he's wearing, and the little Gaelic book is the book of the Mass !"

It's no exaggeration to say that Nora was scared. She came back to the kitchen and sat before the fire. She didn't know what she ought to do. She was between two advices, which of them would be seemliest for her—to put Paraig across her knee and give him a good whipping, or to go on her two knees before him and beg his blessing !

THE PRIEST

“How do I know,” says she to herself, “that it’s not a terrible sin for me to let him make a mimic of the priest like that? But how do I know, after that, that it’s not a saint out of heaven I have in the house? And, sure, it would be a dreadful sin to lay hand on a saint! May God forgive it to me, it’s often I laid the track of my fingers on him already! I don’t know either way. I’m in a strait, surely!” Nora didn’t sleep a wink that night with putting this question through other.

The next morning, as soon as Paraig was cleared off to school, Nora put the lock on the door, left the two young children under the care of Michileen’s mother, and struck the road to Rossnageeragh. She didn’t stop till she came to the parish priest’s house and told her story to Father Ronan from start to finish. The priest only smiled, but Nora was with him till she drew a promise from him that he’d take the road out to her that evening. She whipped home then, satisfied.

The priest didn’t fail her. He struck in to her in the evening. Timely enough, Paraig was in the room “reading Mass.”

THE PRIEST

“On your life, don’t speak, Father!” says Nora. “He’s within.”

The two stole over on their tiptoes to the room door. They looked inside. Paraig was dressed in the shirt and bodice, exactly as he was the day before that, and he praying piously. The priest stood a spell looking at him.

At last my lad turned round, and setting his face towards the people, ~~as~~ it would be :

“*Orate, fratres,*” says he, out loud.

While this was saying, he saw his mother and the priest in the door. He reddened, and stood without a stir.

“Come here to me,” says Father Ronan. Paraig came over timidly.

“What’s this you have going on?” says the priest.

“I was reading Mass, Father,” says Paraig. He said this much shyly, but it was plain he didn’t think that he had done anything out of the way—and, sure, it’s not much he had. But poor Nora was on a tremble with fear.

“Don’t be too hard on him, Father,” says she. “He’s only young.”

The priest laid his hand lightly on the

THE PRIEST

white head of the little lad, and he spoke gently and kindly to him.

"You're too young yet, Paraigean," says he, "to be a priest, and it's not granted to anyone but to God's priest to say the Mass. But whisper here to me. Would you like to be serving Mass on Sunday?"

Paraig's eyes lit up and his cheek reddened again, not with shyness this time but with sheer delight.

"*Ora*, I would, Father," says he; "I'd like nothing at all better."

"That will do," says the priest. "I see you have some of the prayers already."

"But, Father, *a mhuirnin*"—says Nora, and stopped like that, suddenly.

"What's on you now?" says the priest.

"Breeches nor brogues he hasn't worn yet!" says she. "I think it early to put breeches on him till —"

The priest burst out laughing.

"I never heard," says he, "that there was call for breeches. We'll put a little cassock out over his coat, and I warrant it'll fit him nicely. As for shoes, we've a pair that Martin the Fisherman left behind him when he went to Clifden. We'll dress you

THE PRIEST

right, Paraig, no fear," says he. And like that it was settled.

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When the priest was gone, the mother stooped down and kissed her little son.

"My love you are!" says she.

Going to sleep that night, the last words she said to herself were: "My little son will be a priest! And how do I know," says she, closing her eyes, "how do I know that it's not a bishop he might be by-and-by?"

BARBARA

BARBARA

Barbara wasn't too well-favoured, the best day she was. Anybody would admit that much. The first cause of it,—she was purblind. You'd say, to look at her, she was one-eyed. Brideen never gave in that she was, however. Once when another little girl said, out of sheer spite on them both, that Barbara had only "one blind little eye, like the tailor's cat," Brideen said angrily that Barbara had her two eyes as good as anybody, but it's how she'd have one eye shut, for the one was enough for her (let it be blind), to do her share of work. However it was, it couldn't be hidden that she was bald; and I declare a bald head isn't a nice thing in a young woman. Another thing, she was a dummy; or it would be more correct for me to say, that she didn't ever speak with anybody, but with Brideen only. If Brideen told truth, she had a tasty tongue of Irish, and her share of thoughts were the loveliest in the world. It's not well she could walk, for she was one-legged,

BARBARA

and that one leg itself broken. She had two legs on a time, but the dog ate one of them, and the other was broken where she fell from the top of the dresser.

But who's Barbara, say you, or who's Brideen? Brideen is the little girl, or, as she'd say herself, the little slip of a woman, that lives in the house next the master's,—on the left-hand side, I think, going up the road. It's likely you know her now? If you don't, I can't help you. I never heard who her people were, and she herself said to me that her father has ne'er a name but "Daddy." As for Barbara,—well, it's as good for me to tell you her adventures and travels from start to finish.

THE ADVENTURES OF BARBARA HERE.

One day when Brideen's mother got up, she gave their breakfasts to Brideen and to her father, to the dog, to the little cat, to the calves, to the hens, to the geese, to the ducks, and to the little robin redbreast that would come to the door at breakfast-time every morning. When she had that much

BARBARA

done, she ate her own breakfast. Then she began readying herself for the road.

Brideen was sitting on her own little stool without a word out of her, but she putting the eyes through her mother. At long last she spoke :

“ Is mama going from Brideen ? ”

“ She’s not, *a stéir*. Mama will come again in the evening. She’s going to Galway.”

“ Is Brideen going there, too ? ”

“ She’s not, *a chuid*. The road’s too long, and my little girl would be tired. She’ll stay at home making sport for herself, like a good little girl would. Won’t she stay ? ”

“ She will.”

“ She won’t run out on the street ? ”

“ She won’t.”

“ Daddy’ll come in at dinner-time, and ye’ll have a meal together. Give mama a kiss, now.”

The kiss was given, and the mother was going. Brideen started up.

“ Mama ! ”

“ What is it *a rúin* ? ”

“ Won’t you bring home a fairing to Brideen ? ”

BARBARA

“ I will, *a chuid*. A pretty fairing.”

The mother went off, and Brideen remained contented at home. She sat down on her little stool. The dog was curled before the fire, and he snoring. Brideen woke him up, and put a whisper in his ear :

“ Mama will bring home a fairing to Brideen ! ”

“ Wuff ! ” says the dog, and went asleep to himself again. Brideen knew that “ Wuff ! ” was the same as “ Good news ! ”

The little cat was sitting on the hearth. Brideen lifted it in her two arms, rubbed its face to her cheeks, and put a whisper in its ear :

“ Mama will bring home a fairing to Brideen ! ”

“ Mee-ow ! ” says the little cat. Brideen knew that “ Mee-ow ! ” was the same as “ Good news ! ”

She laid the little cat from her, and went about the house singing to herself. She made a little song as follows :

“ O little dog, and O little dog !
Sleep a while till my mama comes !
O little cat, and O little cat !

BARBARA

Be purring till she comes home !
O little dog, and O little cat !
At the fair O ! my mama is,
But she'll come again in the little
evening O !
And she'll bring home a fairing
with her !”

She tried to teach this song to the dog, but it's greater the wish the dog had for sleep than for music. She tried to teach it to the little cat, but the little cat thought its own purring sweeter. When her father came in at midday, nothing would do her but to say this song to him, and make him to learn it by heart.

The mother returned home before evening. The first word Brideen said was :

“ Did you bring the fairing with you, mama ? ”

“ I did, *a chuisle*. ”

“ What did you bring with you ? ”

“ Guess ! ” The mother was standing in the middle of the floor. She had her bag laid on the floor, and her hands behind her.

“ Sweets ? ”

BARBARA

"No !"

"A sugar cake ?"

"No, *muise* ! I have a sugar cake in my bag, but that's not the fairing."

"A pair of stockings ?" Brideen never wore shoes or stockings, and she had been long coveting them.

"No, indeed ! You're too young for stockings a little while yet."

"A prayer book ?" There's no need for me to say that Brideen wasn't able to read (for she hadn't put in a day at school in her life), but she thought she was. "A prayer book ?" says she.

"Not at all !"

"What is it, then ?"

"Look !"

The mother spread out her two hands, and what did she lay bare but a little doll ! A little wooden doll that was bald, and it purblind ; but its two cheeks were as red as a berry, and there was a smile on its mouth. Anybody who'd have an affection for dolls, he would give affection and love to it. Brideen's eyes lit up with joy.

"Ora, isn't it pretty ! Ara, mama, heart, where did you get it ? Ora ó ! I'll have

BARBARA

a child of my very own now,—a child of my very ownen own ! Brideen will have a child ! ”

She snatched the little doll, and she squeezed it to her heart. She kissed its little bald head, and its two red cheeks. She kissed its little mouth, and its little snub nose. Then she remembered herself, raised her head, and says she to her mother :

“ Kith ! ” (like that Brideen would say “ Kiss.”)

The mother stooped down till the little girl kissed her. Then she must kiss the little doll. The father came in at that moment, and he was made do the same.

There wasn't a thing making Brideen anxious that evening but what name she'd christen the doll. Her mother praised “ Molly ” for it, and her father thought the name “ Peggy ” would be apt. But none of these were grand enough, it seemed to Brideen.

“ Why was I called Brideen, daddy ? ” says she after supper.

“ The old women said that you were like your uncle Padraic, and since we couldn't christen you ‘ Padraic,’ you were christened

BARBARA

‘Brigid,’ as that, we thought, was the thing nearest it.”

“Do you think is she here” (the doll),
“like my uncle Padraic, daddy?”

“O, not like a bit. Your uncle Padraic is fair-haired,—and, I believe, he has a beard on him now.”

“Who’s she like, then?”

“*Muise*, ’twould be hard to say, girl!—
’twould be hard, that.”

Brideen meditated for a while. Her father was stripping her clothes from her in front of the fire during this time, for it was time for her to be going to sleep. When she was stripped, she went on her knees, put her two little hands together, and she began like this :

“O Jesus Christ, bless us and save us! O Jesus Christ, bless daddy and mama and Brideen, and keep us safe and well from accident, and from the harm of the year, if it is the will of my Saviour. O God, bless my uncle Padraic that’s now in America, and my Aunt Barbara —.” She stopped, suddenly, and put a shout of joy out of her.

“I have it! I have it, daddy!” says she.

BARBARA

"What have you, love? Wait till you finish your share of prayers."

"My Aunt Barbara! She's like my Aunt Barbara!"

"Who's like your Aunt Barbara?"

"The little doll! That's the name I'll give her! Barbara!"

The father let a great shout of laughter before he remembered that the prayers weren't finished. Brideen didn't laugh, at all, but followed on like this:

"O God, bless my Uncle Padaric that's now in America, and my Aunt Barbara, and (this is an addition she put to it herself), and bless my own little Barbara, and keep her from mortal sin! Amen, O Lord!"

The father burst laughing again. Brideen looked at him, and wonder on her.

"Brush off, now, and in into your bed with you!" says he, as soon as he could speak for the laughing. "And don't forget Barbara!" says he.

"Little fear!" West with her into the room, and into the bed with her with a leap. Be sure she didn't forget Barbara.

From that night out Brideen wouldn't

BARBARA

go to sleep, for gold nor for silver, without Barbara being in the bed with her. She wouldn't sit to take food without Barbara sitting beside her. She wouldn't go out making fun to herself without Barbara being along with her. One Sunday that her mother brought her with her to Mass, Brideen wasn't satisfied till Barbara was brought, too. A neighbour woman wouldn't come in visiting, but Barbara would be introduced to her. One day that the priest struck in to them, Brideen asked him to give Barbara his blessing. He gave his blessing to Brideen herself. She thought it was to the doll he gave it, and she was full-satisfied.

Brideen settled a nice little parlour for Barbara on top of the dresser. She heard that her Aunt Barbara had a parlour (in Uachtar Ard she was living), and she thought that it wasn't too much for Barbara to have a parlour as good as anybody. My poor Barbara fell from the top of the dresser one day, as I have told already, and one of her legs was broken. It's many a disaster over that happened her. Another day the dog grabbed her, and was tearing her joint from

BARBARA

joint till Brideen's mother came to help her. The one leg remained safe with the dog. She fell into the river another time, and she had like to be drowned. It's Brideen's father that came to her help this journey. Brideen herself was almost drowned, and she trying to save her from the river-bank.

If Barbara wasn't too well-favoured the first day she came, it stands to nature it's not better the appearance was on her after putting a year by her. But 'twas all the same to Brideen whether she was well-favoured or ill-favoured. She gave the love of her heart to her from the first minute she laid an eye on her, and it's increasing that love was from day to day. Isn't it the two of them used to have the fun when the mother would leave the house to their care, times she'd be visiting in a neighbour's house ! They would have the floor swept and the plates washed before her, when she'd return. And isn't it on the mother would be the wonder, *mor'eadh!*

"Is it Brideen cleaned the floor for her mama?" she'd say.

BARBARA

"Brideen and Barbara," the little girl would say.

"*Muise*, I don't know what I'd do, if it weren't for the pair of you !" the mother would say. And isn't it on Brideen would be the delight and the pride !

And the long days of summer they would put from them on the hillside, among the fern and flowers !—Brideen gathering daisies and fairy-thimbles and buttercups, and Barbara reckoning them for her (so she'd say) ; Brideen forever talking and telling tales that a human being (not to say a little doll) never heard the likes of before or since, and Barbara listening to her ; it must be she'd be listening attentively, for there wouldn't come a word out of her mouth.

It's my opinion that there wasn't a little girl in Connacht, or if I might say it, in the Continent of Europe, that was more contented and happy-like, than Brideen was those days ; and, I declare, there wasn't a little doll under the hollow of the sun that was more contented and happy-like than Barbara.

That's how it stood till Niamh Goldy-Head came.

II

Niamh Goldy-Head was a native of Dublin. A lady that came to Gortmore learning Irish promised before leaving that she'd send some valuable to Brideen. And, sure, she did. One day, about a week after her departure, Bartly the Postman walked in into the middle of the kitchen and laid a big box on the floor.

"For you, young woman," says he to Brideen.

"*Ara*, what's in it, Bartly?"

"How do I know? A fairy, maybe."

"*O bhó!* Where did you get it?"

"From a little green maneen, with a long blue beard on him, a red cap on his nob, and he riding a hare."

"*Ora*, daddy! And what did he say to you, Bartly?"

"Devil a thing did he say only, 'Give this to Brideen, and my blessing,' and off with him while you'd be winking."

I am doubtful if this story of Bartly's

BARBARA

was all true, but Brideen believed every word of it. She called to her mother, where she was inside in the room tidying the place after the breakfast.

“Mama, mama, a big box for Brideen! A little green mameen, with a long blue beard on him, that gave it to Bartly the Postman!”

The mother came out and Bartly gathered off.

“Mameen, mameen, open the box quick! Bartly thinks it’s maybe a fairy is in it! Hurry, mameen, or how do we know he won’t be smothered inside in the box?”

The mother cut the string. She tore the paper from the box. She lifted the lid. What should be in it, lying nice and comfortably in the box, like a child would be in a cradle, but the grandest and the beautifullest doll that eye ever saw! There was yellow-golden hair on it, and it falling in ringleted tresses over its breast and over its shoulders. There was the blush of the rose on its cheek. It’s the likeness I’d compare its little mouth to—two rowanberries; and ’twas like pearls its teeth were. Its eyes were closed. There was a bright suit of silk covering its body,

BARBARA

and a red mantle of satin over that outside. There was a glittering necklace of noble stones about its throat, and, as a top on all the wonders, there was a royal crown on its head.

"A Queen!" says Brideen in a whisper, for there was a kind of dread on her before this glorious fairy. "A Queen from Tir-na-nOg! Look, mama, she's asleep. Do you think will she waken?"

"Take her in your hand," says the mother.

The little girl stretched out her two hands timidly, laid them reverently on the wonderful doll, and at last lifted it out of the box. No sooner did she take it than the doll opened its eyes, and said in a sweet, weeny voice:

"Mam—a!"

"God bless us!" says the mother, making the sign of the cross on herself, "she can talk!"

There was a queer edge in Brideen's eyes, and there was a queer light in her features. But I don't think she was half as scared as the mother was. Children do be expecting wonders always, and when a

BARBARA

wonderful thing happens it doesn't put as much astonishment on them as it does on grown people.

"Why wouldn't she talk?" says Brideen. "Can't Barbara talk? But it's sweeter entirely this voice than Barbara's voice."

My grief, you are, Barbara! Where were you all this time? Lying on the floor where you fell from Brideen's hand when Bartly came in. I don't know did you hear these words from your friend's mouth. If you did, it's surely they'd go like a stitch through your heart.

Brideen continued speaking. She spoke quickly, her two eyes dancing in her head:

"A Queen this is," says she. "A fairy Queen! Look at the fine suit she's wearing! Look at the mantle of satin is on her! Look at the beautiful crown she has! She's like yon Queen that Stephen of the Stories was discoursing about the other night,—the Queen that came over sea from Tir-na-nOg riding on the white steed. What's the name that was on that Queen, mama?"

"Niamh of the Golden Head."

"This is Niamh Goldy-Head!" says the

BARBARA

little girl. "I'll show her to Stephen the first other time he comes ! Isn't it he will be glad to see her, mama ? He was angry the other night when my daddy said there are no fairies at all in it. I knew my daddy was only joking."

I wouldn't like to say that Niamh Goldy-Head was a fairy, as Brideen thought, but I'm sure there was some magic to do with her ; and I'm full-sure that Brideen herself was under a spell from the moment she came into the house. If she weren't, she wouldn't leave Barbara lying by herself on the floor through the evening, without saying a word to her, or even remembering her, till sleep-time ; nor would she go to sleep without bringing Barbara into the bed with her, as was her habit. It's with trouble you'd believe it, but it's the young Queen that slept along with Brideen that night, instead of the faithful little companion that used sleep with her every night for a year.

Barbara remained lying on the floor, till Brideen's mother found her, and lifted and put her on top of the dresser where her own little parlour was. Barbara spent that night on the top of the dresser. I didn't

BARBARA

hear that Brideen or her mother or her father noticed any lamenting from the kitchen in the middle of the night, and, to say truth, I don't think that Barbara shed a tear. But it's certain she was sad enough, lying up yonder by herself, without her friend's arm about her, without the heat of her friend's body warming her, without man or mortal near her, without hearing a sound but the faint, truly-lonesome sounds that do be heard in a house in the dead time of the night.

BARBARA

III

It's sitting or lying on the top of the dresser that Barbara spent the greater part of the next quarter. 'Twas seldom Brideen used speak to her ; and when she would speak, she'd only say, "Be a good girl, Barbara. You see I'm busy. I must give attention to Niamh Goldy-Head. She's a Queen, you know, and she must be attended well." Brideen was getting older now (I believe she was five years past, or, maybe, five and a-half), and she was rising out of a share of the habits she learned at the start of her babyhood. It's not "Brideen" she'd call herself now, for she knew the meaning that was in the little word "I," and in those little tails "am" and "am not" when they're put after "I." She knew, too, that it's great the respect and the honour due to a Queen, over what is due to a poor, little creatureen like Barbara.

I'm afraid Barbara didn't understand this story at all. She was only a little wooden

BARBARA

doll, and, sure, 'twould be hard for its likes to understand the heart of a girl. It was plain to her that she was cast to one side. It's Niamh Goldy-Head would sleep along with Brideen now ; it's Niamh Goldy-Head would sit beside her at meal-time ; its Niamh Goldy-head would go out on the hill, foot to foot with her, that would lie with her among the fern, and would go with her gathering daisies and fairy-thimbles. It's Niamh Goldy-Head she'd press to her breast. It's Niamh Goldy-Head she'd kiss. Some other body to be in the place you'd be, some other body to be walking with the person you'd walk with, some other body to be kissing the mouth you'd long to kiss,—that's the greatest pain is to be suffered in this world ; and that's the pain was in Barbara's heart now, torturing her from morning till night, and tormenting her from night till morning.

I suppose it'll be said to me that it's not possible for these thoughts, or any other thoughts, to be in Barbara's heart, for wasn't she only a wooden toy, without feeling, without mind, without understanding, without strength ? My answer to

BARBARA

anybody who'd speak like this to me would be:—*How do we know?* How do you or I know that dolls, and wooden toys, and the tree, and the hill, and the river, and the waterfall, and the little blossoms of the field, and the little stones of the strand haven't their own feeling, and mind, and understanding, and guidance?—aye, and the hundred other things we see about us? I don't say they have; but 'twould be daring for me or for anybody else to say that they haven't. The children think they have; and it's my opinion that the children are more discerning in things of this sort than you or I.

One day that Barbara was sitting up lonesomely by herself in her parlour, Brideen and Niamh Goldy-Head were in earnest conversation by the fireside; or, I ought to say, Brideen was in earnest conversation with herself, and Niamh listening to her; for nobody ever heard a word out of the Queen's mouth but only "Mam-a." Brideen's mother was outside the door washing. The father was setting potatoes in the garden. There only remained in the house Brideen and the two dolls.

It's like the little girl was tired, for she'd

BARBARA

spent the morning washing (she'd wash the Queen's sheet and blanket every week). It was short till sleep came on her. It was short, after that, till she dropped her head on her breast and she was in deep slumber. I don't rightly understand what happened after that, but, by all accounts, Brideen was falling down and down, till she was stretched on the hearth-flag within the nearness of an inch to the fire. She didn't waken, for she was sound asleep. It's like that Niamh Goldy-Head was asleep, too, but, however, or whatever, the story is, she didn't stir. There wasn't a soul in the house to protect the darling little child from the death that was faring on her. Nobody knew her to be in peril, but only God and—Barbara.

The mother was working without, and she not thinking that death was that near the child of her heart. She was turning a tune to herself, and lifting it finely, when she heard a "plop"—a sound as if something was falling on the floor.

"What's that, now?" says she to herself. "Something that fell from the wall, it's a chance. It can't be that Brideen meddled with it?"

BARBARA

In with her in a hurry. It's barely the life didn't drop out of her, with the dint of fright. And what wonder? Her darling child was stretched on the hearth, and her little coateen blazing in the fire!

The mother rushed to her across the kitchen, lifted her in her arms, and pulled the coat from her. She only just saved her. If she'd waited another little half-moment, she was too late.

Brideen was awake now, and her two arms about the neck of her mother. She was trembling with the dint of fear, and, sure enough, crying, though it isn't too well she understood the story yet. Her mother was "smothering her with kisses and drowning her with tears."

"What happened me, mama? I was dreaming. I felt hot, and I thought I was going up, up in the sky, and that the sun was burning me? What happened me?"

"It's the will of God that my *stóirín* wasn't burnt,—not with the sun, but with the fire. O, Brideen, your mother's little pet, what would I do if they'd kill you on me? What would your father do? 'Twas God spoke to me coming in that minute!—I

BARBARA

don't know what sort of noise I heard? If it weren't for that, I mightn't have come in at all."

She looked round her. Everything was in its own place on the table, and on the walls, and on the dresser,—but stay! In front of the dresser she took notice of a thing on the floor. What was it? A little body without a head—a doll's body.

"Barbara fallen from the dresser again," says the mother. "My conscience, it's she saved your life to you, Brideen."

"Not falling she did it at all!" says the little girl, "but it's how she saw I was in danger, and she threw a leap from the top of the dresser to save me. O, poor Barbara, you gave your life for my sake!"

She went on her knees, lifted the little corpse of the doll, and kissed it softly and fondly.

"Mama," says she, sadly, "since Niamh Goldy-Head came, I'm afraid I forgot poor Barbara, and it's greater the liking I put in Niamh Goldy-Head than in her; and see, it's she was most true to me in the end. And she's dead now on me, and I won't be able to speak with her ever again, nor to say to

BARBARA

her that I'd rather her a thousand times,—aye, a hundred thousand times — than Niamh."

"It's not dead she is at all," says the mother, "but hurted. Your father will put the head on her again when he comes in."

"If I'd fall from the top of the dresser, mama, and lose my head, would he be able to put it on me again?"

"He wouldn't. But you're not the same as Barbara."

"I am the same. She's dead. Don't you see she's not moving or speaking?"

The mother had to admit this much.

Nothing would convince Brideen that Barbara wasn't killed, and that it wasn't to save her she gave her life. I myself wouldn't say she was right, but I wouldn't say she wasn't. I can only say what I said before: How do I know? How do you know?

Barbara was buried that evening on the side of the hill in the place where she and Brideen spent those long days of summer among the fern and the flowers. There are fairy-thimbles growing at the head of the grave, and daisies and buttercups plentifully about it.

BARBARA

Before going to sleep that night, Brideen called over to her mother.

“Do you think, mama,” says she, “will I see Barbara in heaven?”

“Maybe, by the King of Glory, you might,” says the mother.

“Do you think will I, daddy?” says she to her father.

“I know well you will,” says the father.

Those were the Adventures and Tragic Fate of Barbara up to that time.

EOINEEN OF THE BIRDS

EOINEEN OF THE BIRDS

A conversation that took place between Eoineen of the Birds and his mother, one evening of spring, before the going under of the sun. The song-thrush and the yellow-bunting that heard it, and (as I think) told it to my friends the swallows. The swallows that told the story to me.

“Come on in, pet. It’s rising cold.”

“I can’t stir ■ while yet, little mother. I’m waiting for the swallows.”

“For what, little son?”

“The swallows. I’m thinking they’ll be here this night.”

Eoineen was high on the big rock that was close to the gable of the house, he settled nicely on top of it, and the white back of his head against the foot of the ash-tree that was sheltering him. He had his head raised, and he looking from him southward. His mother looked up at him. It seemed to her that his share of hair was yellow gold where the sun was burning on his head.

EOINEEN OF THE BIRDS

“And where are they coming from, child?”

“From the Southern World—the place it does be summer always. I’m expecting them for a week.”

“And how do you know that it’s this night they’ll come?”

“I don’t know, only thinking it. ’Twould be time for them to be here some day now. I mind that it was this day surely they came last year. I was coming up from the well when I heard their twittering—a sweet, joyful twittering as they’d be saying: ‘We’ve come to you again, Eoineen! News to you from the Southern World!’—and then one of them flew past me, rubbing his wing to my cheek.”

There’s no need to say that this talk put great wonder on the mother. Eoineen never spoke to her like that before. She knew that he put a great wish in the birds, and that it’s many an hour he used spend in the wood or by the strand-side, “talking to them,” as he’d say. But she didn’t understand why there should be that great a wish on him to see the swallows coming again. She knew by his face, as

EOINEEN OF THE BIRDS

well as by the words of his mouth, that he was forever thinking on some thing that was making him anxious. And there came unrest on the woman over it, ■ thing that's no wonder. "Sure, it's queer talk from ■ child," says she in her own mind. She didn't speak ■ breath aloud, however, but she listening to each word that came out of his mouth.

"I'm very lonely since they left me in the harvest," says the little boy again, like one that would be talking to himself. "They had that much to say to me. They're not the same as the song-thrush or the yellow-bunting that do spend the best part of their lives by the ditch-side in the garden. They do have wonderful stories to tell about the lands where it does be summer always, and about the wild seas where the ships are drowned, and about the lime-bright cities where the kings do be always living. It's long, long the road from the Southern World to this country. They see everything coming over, and they don't forget anything. I think long, wanting them."

"Come in, white love, and go to sleep.

EOINEEN OF THE BIRDS

You'll be perished with the cold if you stay out any longer."

"I'll go in presently, little mother. I wouldn't like them to come, and I not to be here to give them welcome. They would be wondering."

The mother saw that it was no good to be at him. She went in, troubled. She cleaned the table and the chairs. She washed the vessels and the dishes. She took the brush, and she brushed the floor. She scoured the kettle and the big pot. She trimmed the lamp, and hung it on the wall. She put more turf on the fire. She did a hundred other things that she needn't have done. Then she sat before the fire, thinking to herself.

The "piper of the ashes" (the cricket) came out, and started on his heartsome tune. The mother stayed by the hearth-side, pondering. The little boy stayed on his airy seat, watching. The cows came home from the pasture. The hen called to her her chickens. The blackbird and the wren, and the other little people of the wood went to sleep. The buzzing of the flies was stopped, and the bleating of the

EOINEEN OF THE BIRDS

lambs. The sun sank slowly till it was close to the bottom of the sky, till it was exactly on the bottom of the sky, till it was under the bottom of the sky. A cold wind blew from the east. The darkness spread on the earth. At last Eoineen came in.

"I fear they won't come this night," says he. "Maybe, with God's help, they might come to-morrow."

.

The morning of the next day came. Eoineen was up early, and he watching out from the top of the rock. The middle of day came. The end of day came. The night came. But, my grief! the swallows did not come.

"Maybe we might see them here to-morrow," says Eoineen, and he coming in sadly that night.

But they didn't see them. Nor did they see them the day after that, nor the day after that again. And it's what Eoineen would say every night and he coming in:

"Maybe they might be with us to-morrow."

EOINEEN OF THE BIRDS

II

There came a delightful evening in the end of April. The air was clear and cool after a shower of rain. There was a wonderful light in the western heavens. The birds sang a strain of music in the wood. The waves were chanting a poem on the strand. But loneliness was on the heart of the boy and he waiting for the swallows.

There was heard, suddenly, a sound that hadn't been heard in that place for more than a half-year. A little, tiny sound. A faint, truly-melodious sound. A pert, joyous twittering, and it unlike any other twittering that comes from the mouth of a bird. With fiery swiftness a small black body drove from the south. It flying high in the air. Two broad, strong wings on it. The shaping of a fork on its tail. It cutting the way before it, like an arrow shot from a bow. It swooped suddenly, it turned, rose again, swooped and turned again. Then it made straight for Eoineen, it speaking at

EOINEEN OF THE BIRDS

the top of its voice, till it lay and nestled in the breast of the little boy after its long journey from the Southern World.

“O, my love, my love you are!” says Eoineen, taking it in his two hands and kissing it on the little black head. “Welcome to me from the strange countries! Are you tired after your lonely journey over lands and over seas? *Ora*, my thousand, thousand loves you are, beautiful little messenger from the country where it does be summer always! Where are your companions from you? Or what happened you on the road, or why didn’t ye come before this?”

While he was speaking like this with the swallow, kissing it again and yet again, and rubbing his hand lovingly over its blue-black wings, its little red throat and its bright, feathered breast, another little bird sailed from the south and alighted beside them. The two birds rose in the air then, and it is the first other place they lay, in their own little nest that was hidden in the ivy that was growing thickly on the walls of the house.

“They are found at last, little mother!”

EOINEEN OF THE BIRDS

says Eoineen, and he running in joyfully. "The swallows are found at last! A pair came this night—the pair who have their nest over my window. The others will be with us to-morrow."

The mother stooped and drew him to her. Then she put a prayer to God in a whisper, giving thanks to Him for sending the swallows to them. The flame that was in the eyes of the boy, it would put delight on the heart of any mother at all.

It was sound the sleep of Eoineen that night.

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The swallows came one after another now—singly at first, in pairs then, and at last in little flocks. Isn't it they were glad when they saw the old place again! The little wood and the brook running through it; the white, sandy beach; the ash-trees that were close to the house; the house itself and the old nests exactly as they left them half a year before that. There was no change on anything but only on the little boy. He was quieter and gentler than he used to be. He was oftener sitting than

EOINEEN OF THE BIRDS

running with himself about the fields, as was his habit before that. He wasn't heard laughing or singing as often as he used be heard. If the swallows took notice of this much—and I wouldn't say they didn't—it's certain that they were sorry for him.

The summer went by. It was seldom Eoineen would stir out on the street, but he sitting contentedly on the top of the rock, looking at the swallows and listening to their twittering. He'd spend the hours like this. 'Twas often he was there from early morning till there came "*tráthnóna gréine buidhe*,"—the evening of the yellow sun; and going within every night he'd have a great lot of stories, beautiful, wonderful stories, to tell to his mother. When she'd question him about these stories, he'd always say to her that it's from the swallows he'd get them.

EOINEEN OF THE BIRDS

III.

The priest came in the evening.

"How is Eoineen of the Birds this weather, Eibhlin?" says he. (The other boys had nicknamed him "Eoineen of the Birds" on account of the love he had for the birds.)

"*Muise*, Father, he wasn't as well for many a long day as he is since the summer came. There's a blush in his cheek I never saw in it before."

The priest looked sharply at her. He had noticed that blush for a time, and if he did, it didn't deceive him. Other people had noticed it, too, and if they did, it didn't deceive them. But it was plain it deceived the mother. There were tears in the priest's eyes, but Eibhlin was blowing the fire, and she didn't see them. There was a stoppage in his voice when he spoke again, but the mother didn't notice it.

"Where's Eoineen now, Eibhlin?"

"He's sitting on the rock outside, 'talking

EOINEEN OF THE BIRDS

to the swallows,' as himself says. It's wonderful the affection he has for those little birds. Do you know, Father, what he said to me the other day?"

"I don't know, Eibhlin."

"He was saying that it's short now till the swallows would be departing from us again, and says he to me, suddenly, 'What would you do, little mother,' says he, 'if I'd steal away from you with the swallows?'"

"And what did you say, Eibhlin?"

"I said to him to brush out with him, and not be bothering me. But I'm thinking ever since on the thing he said, and it's troubling me. Wasn't it a queer thought for him, Father,—he going with the swallows?"

"It's many a queer thought comes into the heart of a child," says the priest. And he went out the door, without saying another word.

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"Dreaming, as usual, Eoineen?"

"No, Father. I'm talking to the swallows."

"Talking to them?"

EOINEEN OF THE BIRDS

"Aye, Father. We do be talking together always."

"And whisper. What do ye be saying to one another?"

"We do be talking about the countries far away, where it does be summer always, and about the wild seas where the ships do be drowned, and about the lime-bright cities where the kings do be always living."

The wonder of his heart came on the priest, as it came on the mother before that.

"It's you do be discoursing on these things, and they listening to you, it's like?"

"No, Father. They, mostly, that do be talking, and I listening to them."

"And do you understand their share of talk, Eoineen?"

"Aye, Father. Don't you understand it?"

"Not too well I understand it. Make room for me on the rock there, and I'll sit a while till you explain to me what they do be saying."

Up with the priest on the rock, and he sat beside the little boy. He put an arm about his neck, and began taking talk out of him.

EOINEEN OF THE BIRDS

"Tell me what the swallows do be saying to you, Eoineen."

"It's many a thing they do be saying to me. It's many a fine story they do tell to me. Did you see that little bird that went past just now, Father?"

"I did."

"That's the cleverest storyteller of them all. That one's nest is under the ivy that's growing over the window of my room. And she has another nest in the Southern World—herself and her mate."

"Has she, Eoineen?"

"Aye — another beautiful little nest thousands and thousands of miles from this. Isn't it a queer story, Father?—to say that the little swallow has two houses, and we having one only?"

"It's queer, indeed. And what sort is the country she has this other house in?"

"When I shut my eyes I see a lonely, awful country. I see it now, Father! A lonely, terrible country. There's neither mountain, nor hill, nor valley in it, but it a great, level, sandy plain. There's neither wood, nor grass, nor growth in it, but the earth as bare as the heart of your palm."

EOINEEN OF THE BIRDS

Sand entirely. Sand under your feet. Sand on every side of you. The sun scorching over your head. Without a cloud at all to be seen in the sky. It very hot. Here and there there's a little grassy spot, as it would be a little island in the middle of the sea. A couple of high trees growing on each spot of them. They sheltered from wind and sun. I see on one of these islands a high cliff. A terrible big cliff. There's a cleft in the cliff, and in the cleft there's a little swallow's nest. That's the nest of my little swallow."

"Who told you this, Eoineen?"

"The swallow. She spends half of her life in that country, herself and her mate. Isn't it the grand life they have on that lonely little island in the middle of the desert! There does be neither cold nor wet in it, frost nor snow, but it summer always. . . . And after that, Father, they don't forget their other little nest here in Ireland, nor the wood, nor the brook, nor the ash-trees, nor me, nor my mother. Every year in the spring they hear, as it would be, a whispering in their ears telling them that the woods are in leaf in Ireland, and that

EOINEEN OF THE BIRDS

the sun is shining on the bawn-fields, and that the lambs are bleating, and I waiting for them. And they bid farewell to their dwelling in the strange country, and they go before them, and they make neither stop nor stay till they see the tops of the ash-trees from them, and till they hear the voice of the river and the bleating of the lambs."

The priest was listening attentively.

"O!—and isn't it wonderful the journey they do have from the Southern World! They leave the big sandy plain behind them, and the high, bald mountains that are on its border, and they go before them till they come to the great sea. Out with them over the sea, flying always, always, without weariness, without growing weak. They see below them the mighty-swelling waves, and the ships ploughing the ocean, and the white sails, and seagulls, and the 'black hags of the sea' (cormorants), and other wonders that I couldn't remember. And times, there rise wind and storm, and they see the ships drowning and the waves rising on top of each other; and themselves, the creatures, do be beaten with the wind, and blinded with the rain and with the salt water,

EOINEEN OF THE BIRDS

till they make out the land at last. A while to them then going before them, and they looking on grassy parks, and on green-topped woods, and on high-headed reeks, and on broad lakes, and on beautiful rivers, and on fine cities, as they were wonderful pictures, and they looking on them down from them. They see people at work. They hear cattle lowing, and children laughing, and bells ringing. But they don't stop, but forever going till they come to the brink of the sea again, and no rest to them then till they strike the country of Ireland."

Eoineen continued speaking like this for a long time, the priest listening to every word he said. They were chatting till the darkness fell, and till the mother called Eoineen in. The priest went home pondering to himself.

EOINEEN OF THE BIRDS

IV

August and September went. October was half out. As the days were getting shorter, Eoineen was rising sadder. 'Twas seldom he'd speak to his mother now, but every night before going to sleep he'd kiss her fondly and tenderly, and he'd say :

"Call me early in the morning, little mother. It's little time I have now. They'll be departing without much delay."

A beautiful day brightened in the middle of the month. Early in the morning, Eoineen took notice that the swallows were crowding together on the top of the house. He didn't stir from his seat the length of that day. Coming in in the evening, says he to his mother :

"They'll be departing to-morrow."

"How do you know, white love?"

"They told me to-day. . . . Little mother," says he again, after a spell of silence.

"What is it, little child?"

"I can't stay here when they're gone. I

EOINEEN OF THE BIRDS

must go along with them. . . . to the country where it does be summer always. You wouldn't be lonely if I'd go?"

"O! treasure, my thousand treasures, don't speak to me like that!" says the mother, taking him and squeezing him to her heart. "You're not to be stolen from me! Sure, you wouldn't leave your little mother, and go after the swallows?"

Eoineen didn't say a word, but to kiss her again and again.

Another day brightened. The little, wee boy was up early. From the start of day hundreds of swallows were gathered together on the ridge of the house. From time to time one or two of them would go off and they'd return again, as if they'd be considering the weather. At last a pair went off and they didn't return. Another pair went off. The third pair went. They were going one after another then, till there didn't remain but one little flock only on the horn of the house. The pair that came first on yon evening of spring six months before that were in this little flock. It's like they were loath to leave the place.

EOINEEN OF THE BIRDS

Eoineen was watching them from the rock. His mother was standing beside him.

The little flock of birds rose in the air, and they faced the Southern World. Going over the top of the wood ■ pair turned back,—the pair whose nest was over the window. Down with them from the sky, making on Eoineen. Over with them then, they flying close to the ground. Their wings rubbed a cheek of the little boy, and they sweeping past him. Up with them in the air again, they speaking sorrowfully, and off for ever with them after the other crowd.

“Mother,” says Eoineen, “they’re calling me. ‘Come to the country where the sun does be shining always,—come, Eoineen, over the wild seas to the Country of Light,—come, Eoineen of the Birds!’ I can’t eny them. A blessing with you, little mother,—my thousand, thousand blessings to you, little mother of my heart. I’m going from you . . . over the wild seas . . . to the country where it does be summer always.”

He let his head back on his mother’s shoulder and he put ■ sigh out of him.

EOINEEN OF THE BIRDS

There was heard the crying of a woman in that lonely place—the crying of a mother keening her child. Eoineen was departed along with the swallows.

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Autumn and winter went by and the spring was at hand again. The woods were in leaf, and the lambs bleating, and the sun shining on the bawn-fields. One glorious evening in April the swallows came. There was a wonderful light at the bottom of the sky in the west, as it was ■ year from that time. The birds sang ■ strain of music in the wood. The waves chanted ■ poem on the strand. But there was no little white-haired boy, sitting on the top of the rock under the shadow of the ash-trees. Inside in the house there was a solitary woman, weeping by the fire.

“ . . . And, darling little son,” says she, “I see the swallows here again, but I’ll never, never see you here.”

The swallows heard her, and they going past the door. I don’t know did Eoineen hear her, as he was thousands of miles away . . . in the country where it does be summer always.

IOSAGAN

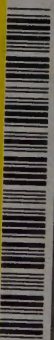
Author's Foreword to *Iosagán agus Sgealta eile*, which is here translated by Mr. Joseph Campbell :

Putting these stories in order, it is no wonder that my thoughts are on the friends that told them to me, and on the lonely place on the edge of Ireland where they live. I see before my eyes a countryside, hilly, crossed with glens, full of rivers, brimming with lakes ; great horns threatening their tops on the verge of the sky in the north-west ; ■ narrow, moaning bay stretching in from the sea on each side of a "ross ;" the "ross" rising up from the round of the bay, but with no height compared with the nigh-hand hills or the horns far off ; a little cluster of houses in each little glen and mountain gap, and a solitary cabin here and there on the shoulder of the hills. I think I hear the ground-bass of the waterfalls and rivers, the sweet cry of the golden plover and curlew, and the low voice of the people in talk by the fireside. . . . My blessing with you little book, to Rossnageeragh and to them in it, my friends !

It is from the "*patairidhe beaga*," the "little soft young things" that Old Matthias used see making sport to themselves on the green that I heard the greater part of the first story. They do be there always, every sunny evening and every fine Sunday morning, running and throwing leaps exactly as they would be when Old Matthias would sit looking on them. I never saw Iosagan among them, but it's like He does be there, for all

that. Isn't His wish to be rejoicing on the earth, and isn't His delight to be along with His Father's children? . . . I have told in the story itself the place and the time I heard THE PRIEST. It's well I remember Nora's little house, and the kindly little woman herself, and the three children. Paraig is serving Mass now, and I hear Taimeen has "*Fromsób Framsób*," by heart. . . . It was from Brideen herself that I heard the adventures of Barbara. One evening that we went in on Oilean ni Raithnighe (the Ferny Island), I and she, it was she told it to me, and we sitting on the brink of the lake looking over on the Big Rock. She showed me Barbara's grave the same evening after our coming home, and she took a promise from me that I'd say a prayer for her friend's soul every night of my life. Brideen will be going to school next year, and she will be able to read the story of Barbara out of this, I hope she will like it. . . . As for EOINEEN OF THE BIRDS, I don't know who it was I heard it from, unless it was from the swallows themselves. Yes, I think it was they told it to me one evening that I was stretched in the heather looking at them flying here and there over Loch Eireamhlach. From what mouth the swallows heard the start of the story, I don't know. From the song-thrush and from that yellow-bunting that have their nests in a ditch of the garden, it's like.

To you, sweet friends, people of the telling of my stories, both little and big, I give and dedicate this little book.



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